

2006 SBE Charter School Visit Report

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State Board of Education**

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Introduction

In March and April, 2006, SBE staff visited 11 of the 12 currently operating public charter schools in Tennessee. Ms. Sharon Thompson, State Board of Education member from Memphis, accompanied the staff on visits to six of the nine public charter schools visited in Memphis. Ms. Carolyn Pearre, State Board member from Nashville, accompanied staff to the two operating public charter schools in Nashville. The outgoing TEA President, Judy Beasley-Whitehill, also accompanied SBE staff to KIPP Academy Nashville. SBE staff interviewed the LEA staff in Memphis and Nashville responsible for coordinating the work of the public charter schools within their districts.

The purpose of the visits and the report is to bring to life the people involved with Tennessee's 12 public charter schools. This report summarizes comments from public charter school faculty and staff, board members, parents and students. It also includes comments from LEA staff working with charter schools.

The report includes school stakeholders' observations of the current charter schools' strengths and challenges, as well as their recommendations for State Board rules and changes to Tennessee's Public Charter School Act that would facilitate their continued success.

In our visits to Tennessee's public charter schools, school leaders, parents and children spoke of their schools' strengths and the challenges they face. Many of the practices the stakeholders felt are helping the schools succeed are being implemented without additional cost to the schools. Given the capital disadvantage faced by Tennessee's public charter schools,¹ the observed effect is that public charter schools are incorporating these changes with less real dollars than might be available to other schools within the respective school districts.

¹ The Basic Education Program (BEP) includes a capital outlay component. Of course, it is customary for local education agencies (LEAs) to issue bonds to pay for new school construction, and BEP funds are disbursed in blocks to the LEAs, which then allocate them as they see fit. However, in theory and according to Tennessee Code Annotated § 49-3-351, LEAs are receiving capital outlay component funds for students in the public charter schools, for whom the LEAs are not in fact, having to provide physical space. Thus, public charter schools operate with significantly less money since they usually spend approximately 20% of their per pupil funds on facilities.

I. School Climate Indicators of Success

During visits to Tennessee's public charter schools, the visitors SBE staff, Board members and the TEA president observed several characteristics which created a nurturing environment for student learning. The team found these characteristics immediately evident and agreed that they merit distinction: a visionary board of directors, high expectations, personalized structure and an extended school day.

A Visionary Board of Directors²

"I was charged with changing math and science education in Memphis," said Steven Bares, president of the Memphis Bioworks foundation and a member of the board of Memphis Academy of Science and Engineering. "I want to create our own version of the Bronx High School of Science."

"We want to have the best middle school in the nation, where we successfully equip students with the necessary academic and social skills to be competitive in the 21st century," noted Derrick Joyce, a board member at the Memphis Academy of Health Sciences. "We are about making sure every student can demonstrate the ability to read, write, speak and calculate with precision and clarity."

The organizational practices of visionary board members included forward looking and well-planned benchmarks for implementation. These benchmarks included securing educational facilities *well in advance* of school opening, selecting very well qualified school leaders and providing them with the support and flexibility to prioritize organizational strategies in the best interest of students. Members of such boards were able to articulate an "on the ground" strategy for sustained community outreach to the local district, parents, non-profit organizations, and private business.

² Tennessee's public charter schools are overseen by boards of directors, which include leaders from important parts of the community. MASE's board includes the Dean of the College of Education at the University of Memphis, the corporate counsel for a large healthcare corporation and an investment management professional. MAHS's board includes medical, legal and financial experts, many of whom are active in the 100 Black Men of Memphis. Southern Avenue's board includes a former district Title I director, a minister, a social worker, juvenile court employee, an attorney, two parents, a banker and a community activist. Two members of the board serve on a trustee committee and are charged solely with raising money. Star Academy's board includes former teachers, a principal, lawyers, a chemist and a guidance counselor. Promise Academy's board includes a former principal, a private school headmaster, a music professor, an attorney, a real estate developer and financial experts.

“I get great satisfaction from being able to lead, to inspire and motivate others to do their job and give them the resources to do that,” said Marc Willis, the chief operating officer and chair of the board of Soulsville (which includes STAX). “I meet with David Hill [the school’s principal] and talk about our vision, but I let him run it.”

Board members used existing organizations and contacts within their communities to secure adequate space for their schools. The STAX Music Academy already had a new facility in which it housed its after-school music programs. The charter school began using those facilities, and its board incorporated expansion of the campus as part of the local community development plan. A church with a large space and dwindling membership was looking for tutoring opportunities within the community. Elise Evans, director of the Southern Avenue Charter School, contracted with the church to use the large space the school now enjoys.³ Star Academy’s board secured space available in the church several of its members attended, where preschool programs were already running. The school’s growth will be accommodated along with growth of the church and its preschool program. MASE leases space in the same building in which the Memphis Bioworks Foundation is housed.

High Academic Expectations

For Students

In the schools with the most positive climate, students could see themselves learning beyond high school. When you walk into KIPP Academy Nashville, the first student you meet will probably greet you like this: “Hi, my name is Jamar. UCLA Class of 2013.”

Though KIPP teachers and administrators instruct its middle school students to select a college or university and learn what year they can anticipate graduating, the students decided on their own to add their college graduation to introductions. In an effort to increase rigor in classrooms and critical thinking of students, KIPP teachers put “WWAED” on the Thinking Skills worksheets students completed during breakfast each morning: “What would Albert Einstein do?”

At City University School in Memphis, students are “scholars” and teachers are “professors.” “We get students in the mindset that this is a different place, and it creates an environment conducive to learning,” noted CUS Chancellor Van Snyder. “Coming to CUS,” explained one of the students, “everything I knew about learning came back.”

³ The school also arranged tutoring opportunities for church members along with Volunteer Memphis (with guidance from the Hyde Foundation).

“Expectations and accountability are close enough to be effective and drive performance,” noted one of the Board members of MAHS.

Ninety-nine percent of the time, these students have not experienced such a rigorous, focused curriculum. We tell parents, “we expect you to go to sleep and your child to still be up studying.” We expect them to be studying 60-70 hours a week. Every child has a learning threshold and we’re going to help them maximize that.

For Parents

Parents in these schools clearly understood how they supported the mission of the school. The chairman of the parent-teacher organization at Star Academy spoke of his daughter and his role on the PTO. “She’s the reigning champ. I’m trying to surpass her. Being involved with the PTO has been great. I’m trying to draw more of the fathers in. I want to be the flagship for everybody else to follow, to show that the program works.”

The accountability the school faces is felt by the parents: “Intensity comes from being held accountable. We know that if we don’t perform, the school won’t be open.” “Being held accountable for parent involvement hours,” a parent at Star Academy explained, “makes it clear the school wants you to care about your own child. That needs to be spread out all over. It seems like it would be simple.”

“I like looking at them ‘Es!’” said a parent at Star Academy. Another parent’s performance was not satisfactory, and she lamented it: “I had an ‘N’ and my daughter was on the honor roll, so I felt really bad.”

Several schools grade parents, based, for example, on the number of hours they volunteer at the school. Most of the schools grading parents required 20 hours a year from the parents. Other factors included how quickly parents respond to student assignments sent home for signature or if they are reading daily with their child. Promise Academy offers bonuses for PTO meetings and field trip assistance.

At the elementary charter schools, parents all felt welcome to come anytime and sit in their children’s classrooms. Many come every day. Promise Academy pays any fees associated with field trips for one parent to attend. At Circles of Success Learning Academy, parents help in the classroom, and with specific tutoring. Parents at MAHS serve as peers and mentors for other parents.

“Parents are motivated when they see their children being successful,” explained a board member at MAHS.

Personalized Structure

Smaller Size

At two middle schools, MAHS and KIPP Academy Nashville, smaller classes allow the schools to incorporate peer mediation in the classroom. One of the parents at MAHS explained, “The children are comfortable enough with the teachers and administrators that they can talk to one of them and trust them.” However, “they have learned in the smaller environment to peer mediate with each other before things get to the principal or teachers. The students trust each other.”

Even in elementary school, the smaller classes lend themselves to collaboration. At Star Academy the students learn to work together in small groups each morning.

“They want the kids to be well-rounded,” said a parent at Star Academy. “In the smaller environment, they are able to see if something is wrong with the whole child – they can recognize how their outside environment affects their learning.” Parents at Star Academy notice the difference: “Because it is such a small school, they are able to find a balance” between “loving them and being stern when necessary. They recognize they are kids and can help them individually with whatever they are dealing with.”

“It is much easier to have a class of 18 students with one class clown than a class of 35 with three class clowns,” said Ms. Atwood, a teacher at the Memphis Academy of Health Sciences (MAHS), which limits classes to 20 students. The smaller class size “gives teachers the chance to teach.” Teachers do not have to move on until they know that the students have “gotten it.”

Modified School year and Day

“8:30 to 5:00 isn’t a problem at all,” explained Brynn, a MASE 8th grader. “Classes are shorter and we come back, so we can go over what we did.” Not to be outdone by an upperclass student, another MASE student added, “With the 7th grade, we go to school on Saturday for activities. It’s very fun.”

MASE uses the longer day to have students go to each class twice a day. During the first session, instruction is given. In the second, students are in the classroom for study sessions when the teacher can give individual help as needed.

KIPP, MAHS and STAX Music Academy students also have longer school days. STAX’s 8:00 – 5:00 schedule gives them 26 percent more seat time than the other schools in the district. MAHS builds six 60-65 minute classes into

the school day. City University School focuses the first 10 minutes of each period on last night's homework, and gives teachers a common planning period from 3:00 to 4:00 p.m.

Star Academy has an extended academic day two times a week, and will probably extend that to three days a week next year. Ms. Black, a mother of a student at Promise Academy, explained, "The schedule works well. If I'm not here at 4:30 to pick him up, he goes to the after school program and knows what to do: he starts working on his reading."

Star Academy has five weeks of half-day enrichment to acclimate their students to the school and program. Teachers send home work during the holiday and summer breaks. KIPP's summer program helps students, often arriving at KIPP three grade levels behind in reading and math, to ramp up in preparation for the beginning of school.

One student, used to getting out of school at 3:00 p.m., said: "It's hard to get used to going an extra two hours every day. But, I enjoy the experience because around 3:00 is when crime usually happens with teenagers." A mother remarked, "There are a lot of latchkey kids. [At MASE], there are teachers waiting and wanting to help the students." She continued: "My child actually wants to get up and go to school. He wants to be here on Saturday!"

A Belief in Customized Academic Programs

Several of Tennessee's public charter schools rely on experienced staff to develop their curricula and provide specialist services.

Southern Avenue Charter School, one of the more exemplary school programs, utilizes curriculum designed by Cameron Smith, who had worked for 27 years as a kindergarten teacher and curriculum writer in Shelby County Schools. Students were given screening tests to determine initial levels (i.e., who would need extra tutoring). And Ms. Smith taught a weekly art class to get to know each of the children. She took the curriculum guides provided by the Memphis City Schools and broke them down further. Parents were provided copies of *What your Kindergartener Needs to Know* or *What Your First Grader Needs to Know* to help them understand what their kids would be expected to learn at the school. These books were distributed at a workshop taught by teachers and paid for with Title I funds.

Mr. Alexander, one of the teachers at MAHS, noted, "The instructional design is the best that I've seen. That is the glue that holds this thing together." Customizing the curriculum to meet State standards and be deliverable in a way that is unique to the individual teacher and relevant for every student was difficult, time consuming work. "I worked many days until 8:30 at night to break this down," explained Ms. Atwood, another MAHS

teacher. “But, once we got past the first year, it became second nature. Now, I don’t move on until I know that students have gotten it.” Now, she said, “my students are telling me, ‘Ms. Atwood, that TCAP was too easy. Your tests are much harder.’”

Rewarding Positive Behavior

Good behavior equals purchasing power at most of the public charter schools. At MASE, earning all Es on report cards will get students \$100 (approximately half the school will earn that money in 2005-2006). The school has a point system for conduct: students will have their end of year trip paid for if they earn 5,000 points.

Promise Academy gives students money for the “Five and Dime” store, based on behavior. Each Friday they can spend the money, with one catch: they have to give the right amount of money to buy items – thereby showing they’ve been paying attention and learning the state financial literacy standards!

Students at STAX earn the right to perform in the orchestra by their conduct. They also participate in the Grammy System: they have a performance score each day, with scores tracked by faculty on a clipboard. Those numbers are particularly helpful to share with parents, when they come to talk about their child’s performance. Parents are, noted Principal David Hill, quick to recognize the reality of those numbers.

At KIPP, students start the week with a \$45 “paycheck”, and can increase that to \$60 based on their behavior. They lose money for speaking out of turn or being disrespectful and earn the right to go on field trips (including their annual trip to Washington, D.C., which is funded by a private company).

At City University School, KIPP and other public charter schools, a large part of the summer program or early orientation (CUS starts two weeks before other district schools, for example) is helping students get used to the conduct expectations and the benefits of their participation.

Uniforms are standard at all the public charter schools and the students recognize the message communicated by the expectation to wear those uniforms. “Some students may not like coming [to our school] because of the uniforms,” explained a student at CUS. “But I think when you go out in public, it gives off a better impression of the school.” Another student, talking about how they wear dress uniforms three days a week (shirt and tie for boys), said, “The owner of the store where I work hired me on the spot because of what I had on that day.”

II. School Climate Indicators for Improvement.

SBE staff visited schools still working towards establishing a school environment that would merit distinction. In each case, these schools were challenged by *both* of the following implementation challenges:

- (a) substantial uncertainty related to securing a school site in the first year of operations;
- (b) school leadership turnover within the first years of school operations;

Memphis Business Academy planned to open in the fall of 2005 in a facility being built in the Frasier area of Memphis. However, the facility was not completed in time. School leaders were able to find space in downtown Memphis that met building and other codes, but only just before the start of classes. The fact that students could now get to school only by car or public transit meant some students withdrew from the school. The lack of a nearby facility also affected recruiting for the next year.

In order to save money and keep class sizes small, Memphis Business Academy relied on some of the board members and founders to operate the school.

The Circles of Success Learning Academy opened in the space used by a church for child care and after-school programs. The school will be housed in a larger space being built on to the church. However, during the first two years, the small space limited the school's ability to provide enrichment programs.

Circles of Success also struggled with staffing issues. During its second year, COSLA had three principals. Also, most of the teachers at COSLA were new to the profession. To assist them, the school had an exemplary educator come three or four times per month to observe and provide mentoring.

Memphis City Schools' administrators use a pre-opening checklist to audit charter schools before they open. One of the requirements on that checklist is a certificate of occupancy issued by the appropriate local government authority. Stacy Thompson, an administrator in the Memphis City Schools Office of Charter Schools, suggested including availability of facilities on the state scoring guide used for evaluating charter school applicants.⁴

⁴ Such a requirement would be more reasonable make more sense if applicants had more time between approval and opening.

Each of these schools is currently comprised of dedicated teachers, students, parents, and staff. However, the presence of both implementation challenges within such schools emphasizes the need to incorporate charter school application parameters that place the *burden of proof* on the applicant to clearly articulate safeguards that will *minimize* the risk of such challenges within the first years of operations. A specific example might include local board policies that encourage and allow the flexibility to approve applications at least a year in advance of school opening.

III. Policy Recommendations for the State Board of Education.

Several recommendations were made by charter school stakeholders. Some require legislation to become effective, others may be implemented by State Board of Education rules, policies or training (conducted with other stakeholders, such as the Department of Education, state or national charter school organizations).

Educate Tennesseans About Tennessee Public Charter Schools

One of the most effective things the State Board of Education can do to improve the educational opportunities for all Tennessee schoolchildren is to educate people about public charter schools.

Charter school stakeholders consistently find that decision-makers and the general public do not understand what the Charter School Act created. Many people, including state and local officials perceive charter schools as something other than public schools. A perception of “us and them” pervades many discussions about “charter schools and public schools” despite the fact that the law allows for the creation of “public charter schools.”

Tennessee’s public charter schools are attractive to districts that view them as labs within their own districts. Charter school operators welcome visits from anyone, and are happy to see their successful practices adopted by other schools in the district.

The State Board could also support the maintenance of a quality charter school resource center or association that can build on the work already done by the Tennessee Charter School Resource Center. Much of the education of decision makers and the general public can be done by such an organization.

School districts can also do more to advertise the successes of the charter schools in their district, and the fact that charter schools provide other options for children who are struggling to succeed in their current schools.

Expand Eligibility

Tennessee's public charter schools have limited enrollment. Only those students who are failing to make adequate progress or those students enrolled in or zoned for schools which, as a whole, are failing to make adequate yearly progress (AYP), may attend public charter schools. Because the State standardized tests are only administered beginning in third grade, public charter schools serving students in preK-3 can only serve students from schools failing to make adequate progress. Thus, Tennessee's public charter school law actually limits eligibility as follows:

- Grades preK-3: students enrolled in or zoned to attend schools failing to make adequate yearly progress
- Grades 4-12: students enrolled in or zoned to attend schools failing to make adequate yearly progress or students failing to test proficient on the TCAP or Gateway examinations.

Tennessee is the only state that actually limits enrollment statewide to students failing to make adequate progress or students from failing schools. Some states encourage charter schools to serve at-risk students by giving preference in charter school applications to those seeking to serve at-risk student populations, or allow charter schools to give priority to at-risk students. But none of the other 40 states (or the District of Columbia) with charter school laws limit enrollment to failing schools or failing students.⁵

The problem is most acute at the "feeder" elementary schools. Rezoning, closing failing schools or "fresh-starting" reduces the eligible pool of students.

Most faculty and administrators at charter schools are focused on helping at-risk students, but they would appreciate having more successful peers in the same group as role-models for all students.

Some means to improve the eligibility would be to:

- change the Public Charter School Act to make any at-risk student eligible to attend, regardless of the school he or she attends (or, at least provide this for elementary charter school eligibility)
- require LEAs to make charter schools one of the options for school choice under the No Child Left Behind Act (right now,

⁵ Center for Education Reform, Charter School Laws, available at: <http://www.edreform.com/index.cfm?fuseAction=cLaw> (last visited June 22, 2006).

LEAs have discretion to include public charter schools as choice schools)

- allow district wide open-enrollment.

“We’d love to have more [currently high-performing] kids who can inspire their peers,” noted a MAHS board member.

Establish Additional Authorizing Authority

States with only one authorizer are generally given low scores by public charter school researchers. The fact that applicants may appeal to the State Board of Education is helpful, but still leaves room for tension between applicants and authorizers.

As one charter school board member pointed out, it is awkward from a business standpoint for the LEA to authorize a school that appears to “compete” with other schools in the district. At the same time, charter school applicants may feel like the hens guarded by a fox.

Many states have multiple authorizers. For example, New York allows LEAs and the New York Board of Regents to grant charters. Indianapolis Mayor Bart Peterson was recently given an education innovation award by Harvard University for the authorizing power of the mayor’s office. Indianapolis has opened 12 mayor-authorized charter schools and will open four more this fall.

To address this, the legislature could amend the Public Charter School Act to provide for multiple authorizers, such as the Board of Regents, the UT system or urban mayors.

Clarify Eligibility Definitions Related to AYP and Student Proficiency

Because of the limited eligibility standards, SBE rules may clarify potential confusion stemming from the timing of the release of AYP and student performance data.

This year, the list of failing schools (based on AYP) and individual student performance information were released in mid- August, at a time when many schools (charters and others) had already begun operation. Releasing standardized test data late in the summer or even after the next school year has begun creates several challenges for every school in an LEA:

1. Teachers and parents miss opportunities to target summer school programs toward students' weak points, as revealed by their test scores.⁶
2. Failing schools may not be able to offer parents and students school choice under NCLB until after students are settled into their current school.⁷
3. LEAs and charter schools may be unclear as to the eligibility of certain students to attend public charter schools, based on the status of schools or the test scores of individual students.

The Tennessee Public Charter Schools Act makes those students eligible who were “previously enrolled in a charter school,” assigned to a school “failing to make adequate yearly progress” or who, “*in the previous school year*, failed to test proficient” on State tests.⁸

When the data was released this month, it was too late for public charter schools to use that data to recruit students for the current year. Several public charter schools had already begun classes by then, having recruited based on the data available. Thus, the students who had already been enrolled remained eligible to attend even after the release of individual scores and the list of failing schools.⁹

The State Board could approve rules that improve this situation. The Board could further define “enrollment” as, for example, the time that parents sign their students up to attend a public charter school. The Board could also define “previous school year” as the year for which data is available at the time of enrollment.

Because of the lack of potential enrollment information, public charter schools cannot easily prepare budgets for the coming year. Some of the public charter schools also reported having a hard time getting access to student names and addresses for recruiting purposes.

Adjust Approval Timeline to Benefit Authorizers and Applicants

⁶ In some states, such as Texas and Michigan, access to these results in a timely manner is critical, since state laws require proficiency on state tests in fifth and eighth grade in order to be promoted. If students do not test proficient, they will not advance. Therefore, it is imperative that they know the results promptly, so further assessment and remediation can begin.

⁷ To any school in the district, even if they do not allow charter schools to be schools of choice (NCLB gives LEAs discretion to designate public charter schools as choice options).

⁸ Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-13-106(a)(1)-(3).

⁹ Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-13-106(a)(1).

The Tennessee Public Charter School Act requires sponsors to apply to the chartering authority “On or before October 1 of the year preceding the year in which the proposed public charter school plans to begin operation.”¹⁰ However, the law also notes that “[i]f approval is a prerequisite for the sponsor to raise working capital, a chartering authority may grant conditional approval for a charter application.”¹¹ Full approval may then be granted following demonstration that the “charter school will have liquid assets sufficiently available to operate the school on an ongoing and sound financial basis.”¹²

Given the challenge of securing adequate facilities, expanding conditional approval or adjusting the application timeline would reduce the strain on chartering authorities and give charter schools more opportunity to start operations fully prepared for all of the business and academic challenges of operating the school. Florida’s charter school law, for example, requires applications to be filed “on or before August 1 of each calendar year for charter schools to be opened at the beginning of the school district’s next school year, or to be opened at a time agreed to by the applicant and the district school board.”¹³

Provide More State Guidance Materials and Training

Public charter schools and authorizing LEAs recommended that the State provide guidelines in several areas: special education in charter schools, renewal and revocation of charters. The State Department of Education has provided training for charter school applicants and guidance to LEAs. However, LEAs and charter school applicants and operators could benefit from additional direction and training.

A team of state, LEA and charter school staff met early in 2006 with consultants working on a technical assistance for providing special education services in charter schools. Some of those same individuals will be attending a national conference on special education in charter schools in November. Once that team’s work on the technical assistance manual is complete, LEAs and charter school operators will have more guidance about implementing and funding the provision of special education services in Tennessee’s public charter schools.¹⁴

¹⁰ Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-13-107 (2006).

¹¹ Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-13-115 (2006).

¹² *Id.*

¹³ Fla. Stat. Ann. § 1002.33(6)(b) (2006).

¹⁴ Charter school administrators we consulted with were generally pleased with the coordination of services between their schools and the LEAs. In Memphis, for example, Dr. Torvino, from the district office, works with administrators at each of the schools to oversee provision of services and compliance with IDEA. Many of the public charter school administrators and staff also worked in special education prior to coming to charter schools, and so had good working relationships and technical knowledge. Metro Nashville Public

As several of the first public charter schools in Tennessee approach the end of their five year charter agreements, charter school leaders and district staff are working to establish renewal procedures that comply with Tennessee's Public Charter School Act and that ensure that only those charter schools that are operating in the best interests of the students, communities and districts are renewed. However, several questions have arisen. For example, when should the charter school apply for renewal? How can LEAs and charter schools avoid the possibility of a "lame duck" year when the current charter is still operational, but renewal has been denied? Because the State Board of Education would hear appeals of charter schools that had renewal denied, the Board may want to consider providing additional guidance through rules or policy.

Because Memphis City Schools has the most and the longest-running public charter schools, it has had time to develop practices that could be helpful for other districts.¹⁵ Because the LEAs have been thorough in their review of charter school applications, Tennessee has, according to Stacey Thompson, "developed a reputation for quality charter schools." The National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) provides guidance to all the different authorizing agencies: LEAs, SEAs, universities, etc. Because of Tennessee's reputation and Memphis City Schools' experience, Thompson said that "NACSA now comes to MCS for assistance." The State Board, together with the State Department of Education, could help arrange for training for Tennessee authorizers by NACSA and MCS.

CONCLUSION

As Stacey Thompson noted, Tennessee is developing a reputation for quality public charter schools. This reputation results partly from the fact that Tennessee adopted public charter school legislation later than many other states, and from the diligent work that authorizing LEAs have done to ensure that those charter school applications that were approved were high quality. Continuing monitoring and auditing will help to continue that trend.

Tennessee is the only state to limit eligibility for charter school enrollment to students who are either failing to test proficient, or who come from a school that has been placed on the list of "failing" schools under the State's accountability system.

Schools requires each public charter school to have and pay for a CSET to monitor IEPs, therapy and other services.

¹⁵ MCS Superintendent Dr. Carol Johnson came to Memphis from Minnesota, one of the first states to adopt public charter school legislation. MCS has one and a half full-time staff members devoted to overseeing the charter schools and coordinating their interaction with the district.

This limitation has presented challenges for public charter schools, since it results in the majority of students enrolled in charter schools arriving two or three grade levels behind in core subjects and often with significant discipline problems. However, as LEAs have been careful to authorize only those public charter school applicants that the LEAs believe will succeed, and schools have implemented practices that create climates for success, most of Tennessee's public charter school students have made significant progress.

Tennessee Public Charter School Data (available on [SBE website](#))

As the University of Memphis' Center for Research in Education Policy noted in its report on the performance of Tennessee public charter schools through 2004-2005, data shows "mostly positive effects" on student performance.¹⁶ Linked below and on the Board's website are the following reports and data sets. The included data on 2005-2006 performance on TCAP and other standardized tests appears to show a continuing trend of mostly positive performance in Tennessee's public charter schools.

1. [2006 State Dept. of Ed. Report to General Assembly on Charter Schools](#)
2. [Univ. of Memphis CREP Year 2 Charter School Student Performance](#)
3. [Univ. of Memphis CREP Year 2 Charter School Evaluation \(parents, students, staff\)](#)
4. [2005-06 School Performance, Memphis Academy of Health Sciences](#)
5. [2005-06 School Performance, Star Academy](#)
6. [2005-06 School Performance \(SAT-10\), KIPP Academy Nashville](#)
7. [2005-06 School Performance \(TCAP\), KIPP Academy Nashville](#)

¹⁶ In February 2008, the Comptroller is to report to the legislature on the performance of public charter schools, with emphasis on data. By that time, several public charter schools will have three to five years of enrollment completed and a larger set of data for analysis.